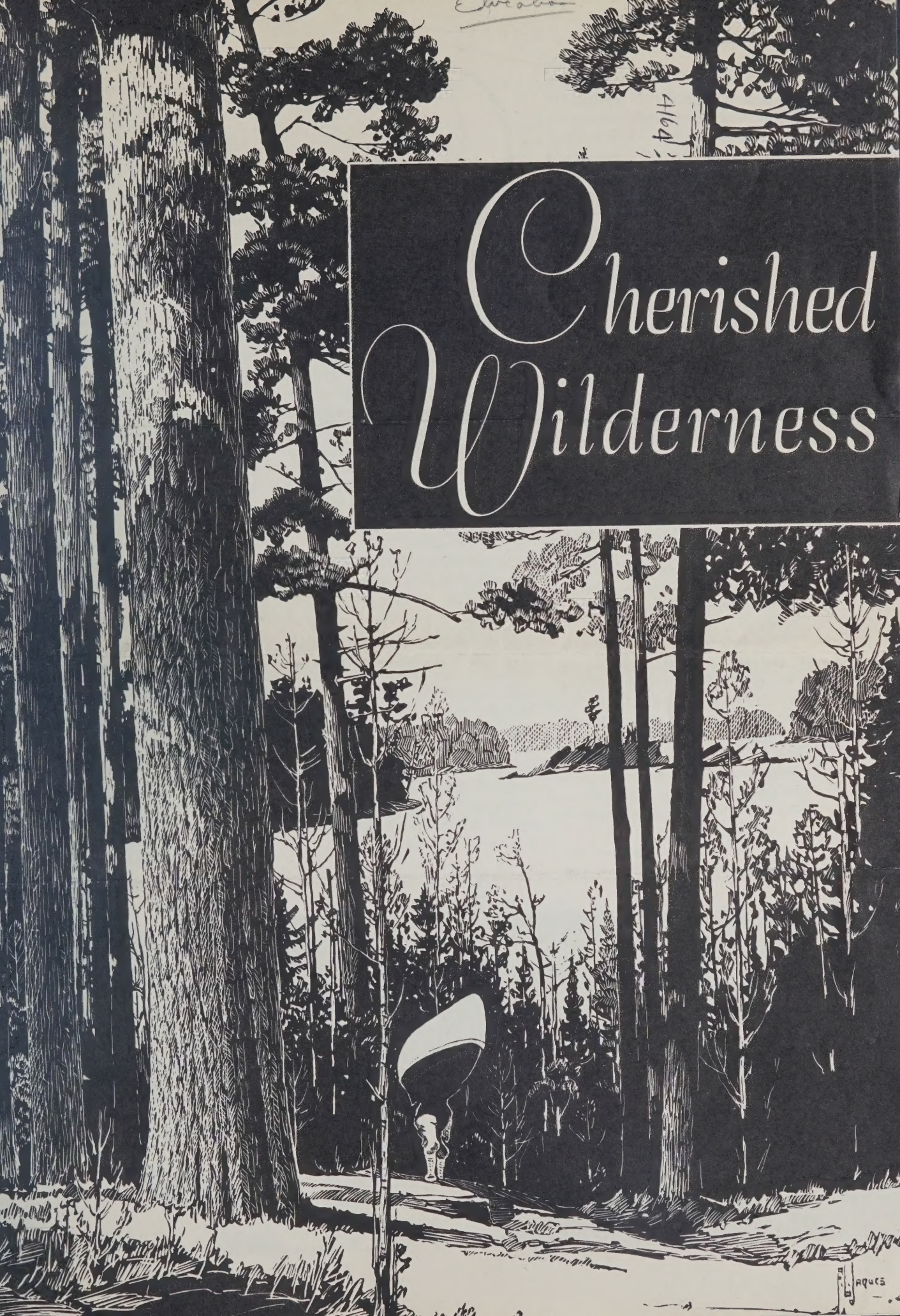
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By canoe and snowshoe in a primeval wonderland whic

"BUT of all the wildernesses that you know," people say to us, " you cherish most your canoe country. *Why* do you love it most? Why have these friends you speak of been willing to give years, sometimes their entire lives, to preserve its wildness?"

I will try to answer those questions.

First, we, and many many others, love this canoe country because it is truly a solitude. It is not overrun with people as are many of the accessible wilderness areas. Instead of a few roads or trails on which you must meet all visitors, you may travel in your canoe in any direction, and yet you do not need a guide—only a good map. So you have the joy of seeing a true wilderness with utter freedom.

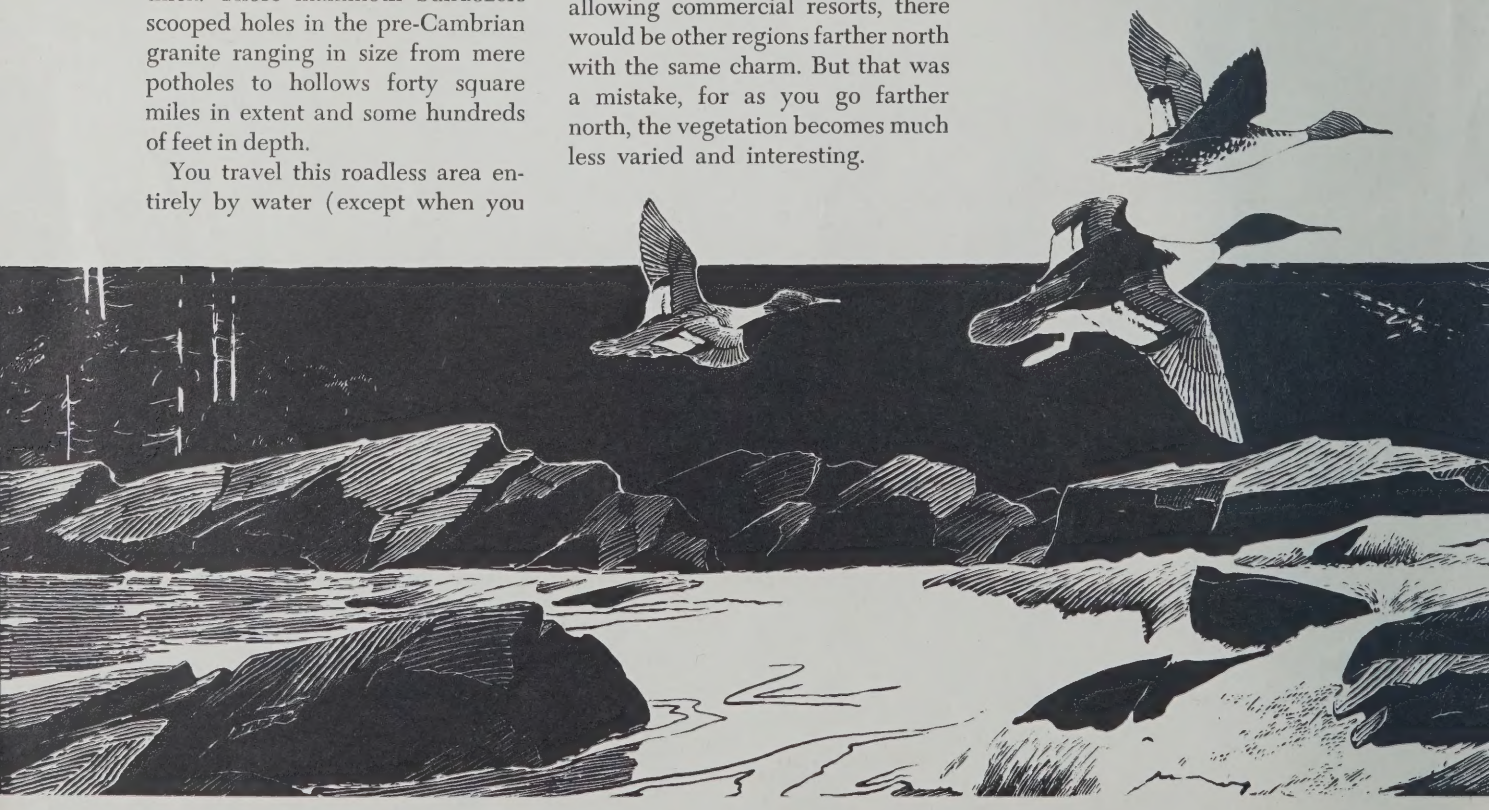
This area, the Quetico-Superior, lies on the borders of Minnesota and Ontario, between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods. It is hardly limited in space, being about 175 miles long and containing around 16,000 square miles. It is a maze, a labyrinth of countless lakes, tied together by rivers and channels—in fact, 40 per cent of the surface of this land is covered by water. These lakes were made in the recent Ice Age by glaciers more than a mile thick. Those mammoth bulldozers scooped holes in the pre-Cambrian granite ranging in size from mere potholes to hollows forty square miles in extent and some hundreds of feet in depth.

You travel this roadless area entirely by water (except when you make a portage) just as the earliest travelers did. Airplanes will soon be banned from flying over the area, to the great relief of its devotees, so that there will be no danger of finding the ancient peace shattered by a sudden onslaught of the motorized era! It is practically uninhabited, and as you journey through it, it looks as it did to the Indians and voyagers in the early days. It is possible to canoe for days without seeing other campers.

In the second place, we love the region for its sheer beauty. To enter it is to enter a forest realm of unspoiled loveliness. With lake after lake of blue lucidity, it does not matter where you choose your way, for a fresh beauty is everywhere. And such diversified beauty! I once thought that if this country were spoiled by changing water levels or allowing commercial resorts, there would be other regions farther north with the same charm. But that was a mistake, for as you go farther north, the vegetation becomes much less varied and interesting.

Here are lakes of purest clarity, streams quiet or wild with white water. Here are forests of pine, of spruce, of aspen, birch, and other hardwoods. Great granite cliffs, deep in moss and ferns, tower above, and marshes stand thick with reeds and wild rice. Here are bare, stony hills, rapids that rush by shadowed ledges, sandy beaches. Here, best of all, are hundreds and hundreds of big and little islands. Once the tops of craggy hills, they are survivors of the Ice Age—low ones of smooth-washed stone, and rocky heights black with pine.

And it is just as inspiring to the other senses, all of which seem suddenly to awaken. As you take a portage trail through the dense spruce, you are vividly, not dimly, aware of its resilience underfoot, of the scent of the pungent sweet gale leaves,



Cherished Wilderness

By canoe and snowshoe in a primeval wonderland which every nature lover will want to see preserved—

the Quetico-Superior area, whose beauty hangs in the conservation balance

By FLORENCE PAGE JAQUES *Illustrated by* FRANCIS LEE JAQUES*

"BUT of all the wildernesses that you know," people say to us, "you cherish most your canoe country. *Why* do you love it most? Why have these friends you speak of been willing to give years, sometimes their entire lives, to preserve its wildness?"

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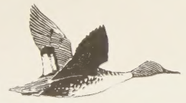
Here are lakes of purest clarity, streams quiet or wild with white water. Here are forests of pine, of spruce, of aspen, birch, and other hardwoods. Great granite cliffs, deep in moss and ferns, tower above, and marshes stand thick with reeds and wild rice. Here are bare, stony hills, rapids that rush by shadowed ledges, sandy beaches. Here, best of all, are hundreds and hundreds of big and little islands. Once the tops of craggy hills, they are survivors of the Ice Age—low ones of smooth-washed stone, and rocky heights black with pine.

And it is just as inspiring to the other senses, all of which seem suddenly to awaken. As you take a portage trail through the dense spruce, you are vividly, not dimly, aware of its resilience underfoot, of the scent of the pungent sweet gale leaves, and the poignant song of the hermit thrush, while at the end of the trail you may be refreshed by the taste of the clear water you dip from any lake or stream.



Memory brings back the smell of campfire smoke, sun-warmed pines, and damp muskeg; the taste of bass, freshly caught; the sound of a deer's whistle or the slow plunge as a moose leaves the water, and the never-forgotten loon call.

The greatest boon of all, however, is to listen to the profound silence. You cannot realize how frail most silence is until you experience this, so deep that you can trust your whole being to it, sure of its strength.

Then there is the enjoyment of physical effort. The mere breathing of the stainless, heady air; the exhilaration of paddling, drifting down glassy water or fighting furiously against a head wind. Because of the rocky terrain, making camp is seldom difficult, for there are innumerable sites to choose from. Portages are most enjoyable, if they are short ones and if you make them easy by walking across two or three times instead of lugging everything at once. The shadowy walk itself is a welcome change after the hot sun or boisterous wind over the water—if you aren't staggering under too heavy a load. Fishing is excellent in many of the lakes.

All these experiences we savor to their full because of the way we travel here. We are all dashing through the present world so fast we scarcely have time to see it. But in these primitive fastnesses all our senses have a chance to come fully into play.

I have to admit to a naive astonishment when I discovered that this country had as great beauty in winter. After our *Canoe Country* was published, the University of Minnesota Press gave us a fellowship so that we could get the material for *Snowshoe Country*. We were to stay in the same territory in the winter-time. Because I had always dreaded cold weather, I was simply horrified at our good fortune.

I never once thought of refusing it, but I expected the worst. It was, however, one of the most rewarding experiences I ever had, and I would do it again any time I had the chance. Of course, we didn't camp; we stayed in a small cabin on the edge of the roadless area. To my surprise, a small stove made from an oil drum kept us perfectly warm indoors, blizzard or no, and I found that, dressed in layers of wool, I was more comfortable outdoors in 30-below-zero weather than I had sometimes felt on a sticky August day. I even found that in my ski suit I could rest, lying in a snowdrift, while I watched a pine grosbeak sing or a shrew dart hither and thither, and feel as much at ease as if I lay on a sand dune. For a while, at least.

And the glory all about us was unbelievable. Deep snow covers the country the entire winter. I had thought there might be a monotony about such a continually white landscape, but it was never just white. There was a continual play of color about us. The apple-green skies might reflect in the frozen lakes, or a bright sun would change the shadows on the snow to vivid blue or strong violet. Evening light might touch the snowy hills with gold and the morning with clear shell-pink or lavender. We had stormy sunsets of scarlet and purple beyond snowy pines, and we had northern lights of such strange hues I could not recognize them. Hoarfrost might be so thick upon the scraggly aspens in the morning that they looked all aflower with silver. I had thought that if the winter dragged we could always escape to Duluth for a few days; I never even remembered that idea after we were in our cabin.

The winter sounds I remember even more distinctly—the deep clangs, like those from an enormous gong, which the lake gave, and the crack of branches in the coldest weather, and the uproar the sled dogs made late at night when a wolf or a fox barked. Whenever I now hear the spring song of the chickadee—those two little notes like a miniature phoebe's—I think of a warm January day on the Gunflint Trail. And there is the faint *shushh* when a drift of snow slips from the laden branches of a spruce. I sometimes put myself to sleep remembering the nights when we walked on snowshoes along the trail before we went to bed; there would be that *shushh*, and then a deer might bound across before us in the dim snow light and disappear in the black forest. Yes, we appreciated the country in winter, too.

But most of all, I am sure, we love the canoe country for the release it brings us from our complex modern existence. This is not an escape from reality—in fact, it is an awakening to what *is* reality. The canoe country gives us the joy that should be man's heritage.

We are released from possessions. And how exultant we feel when we arrive at this simplicity—to start off in a fragile shell (for a canoe is the most trifling barrier from nature imaginable) with all our worldly goods in a few packsacks, with no need for immense mechanisms or complicated contrivances to aid us on our way, with only sturdy paddles in our hands.

We are released from time. Imagine having no need for a watch, having no appointments or schedules. There is no hurry, for as each square mile of the many thousands is rich in interest, why rush anywhere? On the other hand, if we have a desire to wander, we do not need to wait for a train or a boat to start or a gas station to open.

Suppose we have had a lazy, rain-bound day and have gone to sleep in our sleeping bags immediately after an early supper. Suppose we awake sometime long after midnight to find that a full moon is flooding the lake with brilliance and that fantastic pine shadows lie black on the shore beyond our small tent. There is nothing to prevent us from breaking camp and starting out through the night into a silvery and silent world. So silent that we not only do not talk but put our paddles into the shining water with meticulous care. The moon leads us on, pines stand jet-black in mysterious ranks on either shore. What eyes are looking at us from those inky depths? Far off we hear the hooting of a great horned owl.

We come to a moonlit river, where white stones gleam in faintly rippled water and bulrushes look as if they had been dipped in quicksilver. Something slips away down the water, leaving a sharp-drawn wake. Then we come to a density of overhanging branches where the night lurks blackest.

As we emerge into another wide lake, there is a hint of dawn in the eastern sky, and we watch as the faint rose light gradually gains victory over the silver. We hear a single whitethroat, then silence and darkness again. After an interval, a loon laughing wildly somewhere down the lake brings the true dawn. We find that we are ravenously hungry and stop on an island for a hearty breakfast among its jack pines.

Or we may be intent on reaching a river where we hope we may find moose. But when we come to a crescent of sand beach, why not see what tracks are there? And while we're there, why not go swimming? So we do. Then we decide to fish, after which we climb on clean mats of pine needles to a hilltop for lunch and decide it is too delightful a day not to swim again, so we make camp, even if it is only early afternoon. We may spend several days there, or we may go on to the moose river early the next morning. No one minds.

We are released, too, into a wider acceptance of companionship, when, as Wordsworth says,

With an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

We discover ties of comradeship with the animals and birds, even the plants that share this region equally with us. Here they are not under tolerance. This is their land. They have as much right as we, or more, to this domain.

So when we make camp under the horizontal branches of a white pine, we feel a companionship with it. In an unexpected October storm

*FLORENCE PAGE AND FRANCIS LEE JAQUES hardly need an introduction to the readers of NATURAL HISTORY, for many of their interesting and beautifully illustrated books have been reviewed in this magazine. *Birds Across the Sky*, *Canadian Spring*, and *The Geese Fly High* were written by Mrs. Jaques and illustrated by Mr. Jaques. In 1946, they were jointly the recipients of the John Burroughs Medal.

Mr. Jaques, one of the world's most distinguished bird artists, worked at The American Museum for many years, where he painted many outstanding panoramic backgrounds. He has accompanied expeditions to the Arctic, the Polynesian Islands, Panama, and the Bahamas.—ED.

the scarlet of bunchberries through the snow has seemed as warm a welcome as children might give us. And we hail the deer we encounter, the flocks of young mergansers, the exuberant pileated woodpecker, as long-loved friends. To my surprise, I become very fond of porcupines. Somehow a porcupine swimming is a rather touching sight, and when I see a small one eating leaves and swinging gaily in a thrashing treetop, I almost want to join him. Even more surprising is to begin to care for wood mice, who are really entrancing neighbors though they may annoy you.

I never think of being isolated here. I feel the release from the heavy weight humanity now carries, rather than loneliness. How could we be lonely? We meet new friends all the time.

Once I was lucky enough to see the purple finch giving his courtship dance. I had not known that a small songbird gave such a performance. In his vibrating intensity, he would have equaled the birds of paradise we once saw in their courtship at the zoo—if his feathers had been as long! Clad in brilliant rose, he danced up and down a small log before his ladylove. He turned about and about, with his crest high, raising his wings and quivering them so rapidly that they blurred into rosy radiance. Then he sprang into the air and sang in flight as if he were trying to be a rose-red skylark, before he returned to dance on the log once more.

Another morning two loons permitted us to drift up to them, until we were hardly more than a paddle's length away. We were highly flattered, but we couldn't understand why such wild birds as loons would continue to let us float in company with them. We were so close we could see every detail of their black-and-white plumage, even the clear red iris of their eyes. Finally Lee spotted their nest on a hummock in the marsh close at hand, and we understood their lingering.

I treasure the memory of an autumn day when we were exploring along a shore. Golden aspens were reflected so perfectly in the dark water that we seemed enclosed in a spangled net, and I felt bewitched, as if our canoe were floating in the air in the center of this gold shimmer. To add to the strangeness, when we came round a point of rock and saw a bear facing us, it made no effort to run away as a bear should.

To look straight into the eyes of a black bear a few yards away is an odd experience. The bear gave no start of alarm and neither did we, but there was not the accord one feels with a deer in such a situation. For a moment before the deer realizes that you may be a menace, there is an inexplicable bond as its eyes encounter yours. There is no such bond with a bear! Its look changed from curiosity to disdain, and my look, if not Lee's, to apprehension, as the animal shifted feet before leisurely strolling off into the thick bushes.

Then there was the day when we had battled across a wind-tossed, white-capped lake and, tired but triumphant, came into a cove. As we floated up to shore, we saw a spotted sandpiper with her two minute babies, probably just hatched. She ran for shelter, calling peremptorily. One baby was an old-fashioned infant and obeyed mother instantly, but the other, a modern child, paid no attention to her stern command. It came out to the shore to look us over, living up to its family nickname by teetering its nonexistent tail. Such a scrap of life; but it met us on equal terms. We felt we had been congratulated on our safe arrival by a reception committee of one, and we appreciated the courtesy.

These are some of the reasons why we have such a passionate desire to see this region kept unspoiled. It is a unique treasure which we trust fervently may be preserved for the generations to come. If I could save any part of our physical heritage unchanged, it would be the woods and waters of the Quetico-Superior. For ever since I first went there, whenever I chance to think of our canoe country, an inexpressible delight and peace flood through me in a great tide.

Reprinted from

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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE

The President's Quetico-Superior Committee was appointed to consult with and invoke the aid of federal and state departments and agencies and other civic, scientific, educational, recreational and conservation organizations concerning the use and preservation of the Quetico-Superior area in the public interest. This requires the carrying on of studies concerning the public uses to which wilderness can be put and the perfecting of a plan for the public use of the area which will not destroy its wilderness character. This includes devising a system of zoning which takes into account the nature of the different parts of the area and the public uses to which each portion can best be put. It is also necessary to obtain funds for the purchase of private holdings within the roadless portion of the Superior National Forest for transfer to the Government. The Committee has no funds of its own with which to carry on this work.

You may help in this effort—

1. By the contribution of funds to the Quetico-Superior Foundation, 2550 Pillsbury Avenue, Minneapolis 4, Minnesota. Such contributions will be used to aid in carrying out the Quetico-Superior program.

2. By contributing to the Izaak Walton League of America Endowment, 31 North State Street, Chicago 2, Illinois, for aid in expediting public ownership of key tracts in the Superior Roadless Areas.

3. By aiding in the dissemination of information concerning the nature of the Quetico-Superior program and the reasons why it is in the public interest. Additional copies of this pamphlet and other printed matter are available upon request to the President's Committee.

4. By making known to the governmental agencies responsible for the administration of the area your keen interest in any action affecting the Quetico Superior program.

THE PRESIDENT'S QUETICO-SUPERIOR COMMITTEE

919 North Michigan Avenue

Chicago 11, Illinois